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**Fifth Committee**

**Summary record of the 25th meeting**
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Monday, 10 November 1997, at 10 a.m.

*Chairman:* Mr. Chowdhury ..... (Bangladesh)
*later:* Ms. Daes (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Greece)
*later:* Ms. Incera (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Costa Rica)
*Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions:* Mr. Mselle

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*The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.*

**Agenda item 116: proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999** *(continued)* (A/52/6 (vol. II), A/52/7 (chap. II, Parts VI to VIII) and A/52/16 and Add.1)

*Section 22, Human rights*

*Section 23, Protection of and assistance to refugees*

*Section 24, Palestine refugees*

*Section 25, Humanitarian assistance*

1. ***Ms. Daes*** *(Greece), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

2. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions), introducing the first report of the Advisory Committee on Part VI (Human rights and humanitarian affairs) of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999 (A/52/7 (chap. II, Part VI)), said, with regard to section 22 (Human rights), that the Advisory Committee was of the view that there was a need to streamline reporting to donors and to take steps to ensure that trust funds, especially the large ones, were audited more extensively. The Advisory Committee also noted that the reasons for the abolition of 16 regular budget posts, all vacant, had not been explained. Further, there was a need to clarify the relationship of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Centre to the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Political Affairs and other offices of the Secretariat involved in human rights. The comments of ACABQ on the New York Liaison Office formed part of its general comments on liaison offices in chapter I of its report. The Advisory Committee was of the view that the complexity of intergovernmental human rights machinery was such that it could adversely affect the efficiency of the legislative process. There was a need for review of the documentation required by that machinery, in which connection the Advisory Committee noted that there was no indication that there had been any follow-up to the recommendation, which had been approved by the General Assembly contained in its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997.

3. With regard to the protection of and assistance to refugees, the policy followed by the General Assembly and the Secretariat of reducing regular budget funding for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees had resulted in 24 posts being left vacant. As the functions of those posts could not be dispensed with, UNHCR had funded the cost of the posts from its voluntary contributions. In the past the Advisory Committee had discouraged the transfer of extrabudgetary posts to the regular budget, and had the same reservations regarding transferring regular budget funding to extrabudgetary funding.

4. With respect to Palestine refugees, there was little to add to the contents of paragraphs 18 to 21 of the Advisory Committee's report. Humanitarian assistance activities would be affected by the Secretary-General's reform proposals; the Advisory Committee would thus return to the question in the context of its report on document A/52/303.

5. **Mr. Chinvanno** (Vice-Chairman of the Committee for Programme and Coordination), presenting the conclusions and recommendations contained in the report of the Committee for Programme and Coordination (A/52/16), said that, having been unable to reach agreement on a recommendation to the General Assembly that it should approve the programme narrative of section 22, Human rights, the Committee had recommended to the Assembly that it should review the programme narrative, paying due attention to the observations of delegations. It had further recommended that the General Assembly should approve the programme narrative of section 23, Protection of and assistance to refugees, with the modifications contained in paragraph 246 (a) to (e) of its report, as well as the programme narratives of sections 24, Palestine refugees, and 25, Humanitarian assistance, subject to further consideration of the latter section.

6. **Mr. Maddens** (Belgium), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the associate countries of Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia and, in addition, Norway, recalled his delegation's earlier observation that the proportion of the budget devoted to certain priority sectors, including human rights and humanitarian affairs, seemed small.

7. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights was undergoing major changes, the most important of which were its restructuring and deeper integration of human rights into the Organization's overall work programme. That development, which was part of the Secretary-General's reform proposals, would certainly help the Secretary-General to more effectively carry out the activities mandated by the Charter, the medium-term plan and the resolutions of the General Assembly. In that regard, the Secretary-General seemed to have already taken into consideration some of the concerns of the Advisory Committee about coordination between the Office of the High Commissioner and the relevant bodies within the Secretariat. On the other hand, while he welcomed the role

which the Secretary-General sought to entrust to the Organization in the field of human rights, it should nevertheless be noted that the share of the budget devoted to those activities remained virtually unchanged at 1.8 per cent.

8. Having noted the proposed budget cuts and staff reductions, the European Union was concerned at the reduction, in both absolute and relative terms, in the resources earmarked to one of the priority sectors of the Organization. Consideration should be given to the possibility of increasing the level of resources earmarked for subprogrammes 2 and 3, especially in the light of the Secretary-General's intention to more deeply integrate human rights into the activities of the United Nations. The European Union also welcomed the strengthening of the New York office of the High Commissioner, which was one of the key elements of the Secretary-General's proposals in that field. Greater coordination between the Office of the High Commissioner and the relevant bodies of the Secretariat meant in fact that the representatives of the High Commissioner should be in a position to participate in all stages of the activities of the delegations of Member States.

9. With regard to meetings and publications, organs should continuously strive to adapt to changing requirements and the recommendations of the High Commissioner on that subject were eagerly awaited. While he supported the efforts made to adapt conference calendars and working methods, he noted that the volume of mandates to be implemented was increasing. He hoped that the proposals concerning field activities (thematic or expert missions, for example) would take into account the principle that related expenditure should be funded from budgetary allocations and that adequate resources should be provided for a dignified commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and for undertaking in 1998 the review of the follow-up to the Vienna Conference.

10. The European Union, which had long been concerned by the problems identified in the work of the Office of the High Commissioner, such as those referred to in paragraphs 54 and 55 of the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services, hoped that the new High Commissioner would have the will to address that situation and that Member States would provide her with the necessary resources and support.

11. Under section 25, Humanitarian assistance, the European Union continued to support the reforms proposed by the Secretary-General, whom it requested once more to appoint without delay the new Emergency Relief Coordinator, so that the latter could contribute his ideas to the restructuring that was under way. It also remained very concerned over the fact that only 0.86 per cent of the regular budget should be devoted to that priority sector, representing only 10 per cent of the resources available for humanitarian assistance, even though close coordination had become more essential than ever on account of the proliferation of humanitarian crises and their duration and complexity. The Emergency Relief Coordinator could not be expected to fully play his role if the Organization's activities in that field were subject to the fluctuations of voluntary contributions. The efforts made to strengthen the financial base of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs were inadequate, given the enormous challenges posed by contemporary humanitarian crises.

12. On the subject of trust funds, the Advisory Committee had correctly observed that guidelines should be established and criteria set for funds that should be exempt and those which were to be charged the full rate of 13 per cent. It would even be advisable for the Secretary-General to carry out a study to identify the legislative texts on which the application of those rates was based and what was the method used. In that connection, the European Union fully endorsed the Advisory Committee's recommendation that a computerized system should be established to manage the trust funds. Finally, on the question of gratis personnel seconded to the Department, the position of the European Union was the same as the one it had expressed on the subject of section 3 of the proposed programme budget.

13. **Mr. Moktefi** (Algeria) said that his country, as an enthusiastic supporter of the promotion of all human rights and the implementation of an integrated and multidimensional strategy to support the right to development, regretted that the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) had been unable to reach agreement on a description of the programme related to that area. The Committee would come back to it later, since it was affected by the Secretary-General's proposed reform.

14. His delegation shared the regret expressed by the Advisory Committee that a thorough audit of the trust funds had not been possible. It approved of the Committee's recommendation concerning staff at the New York Liaison Office, and felt that it was essential to review the issue. It also wished to receive additional information on the restructuring of the Centre for Human Rights.

15. With reference to section 24, his delegation strongly supported the activities planned for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and recognized the work it had accomplished. He hoped that its activities would receive

stable long-term financing and wished to receive information concerning reductions in staff.

16. With reference to section 25, his delegation shared the concerns expressed by the Advisory Committee with regard to the inadequate resources allocated to auditing extrabudgetary funds, especially when the amount was as large as the sum proposed for inclusion in the programme budget. He also noted that there were a small number of gratis personnel, which was not in keeping with the expressed wishes of the General Assembly or the Secretary-General to stop using such personnel. It would be helpful if the Secretariat could provide further explanations on that point.

17. **Mr. Abdullah** (Bahrain) expressed concern that the table in section 24.3 (Palestine refugees) showed that 8 budgetary posts and 19 extrabudgetary posts were to be eliminated. Insufficient information was available on the effects of those reductions on programme delivery, but it was necessary to ensure that the Agency would be able to carry out its mission unimpeded.

18. **Mr. Jaremczuk** (Poland) associated his delegation with the statement made by the representative of Belgium on behalf of the European Union.

19. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) said that she deeply regretted that the CPC had been unable to reach agreement on section 22 (Human rights). She recalled paragraphs 22.55 and 22.57 of the proposed programme budget which contained an entirely new feature: a request for the funding of activities which had not been approved by a deliberative body. Her delegation protested against that practice, which was contrary to the provisions of General Assembly resolutions 41/213 and 42/211, which clearly stated that new mandates must be financed from the contingency fund. It was even more shocking that at the same time, other, duly approved, activities would be receiving inadequate funding. The Secretariat must present a session document explaining those changes at a formal meeting, prior to the consultations.

20. Moreover, there had been a reorganization in Geneva but the General Assembly had not had an opportunity to examine the question. Yet, as paragraphs 227 and 235 of the report of the CPC pointed out, the General Assembly had adopted programme 19 (Human rights) without prejudice to consideration of the restructuring process for the Centre for Human Rights. Her delegation would like the Secretariat to provide information on that reorganization and took note of the doubts expressed by the Advisory Committee concerning the link between the reorganization of the Centre and its efficiency.

21. Referring to paragraphs 22.8 and 22.9 of the proposed programme budget, she noted the drop in resources for subprogramme 1, which covered activities related to the right to development. In that regard, she took note of the comments in paragraph 228 of the report of the Advisory Committee. She also expressed concern about the meagreness of the resources allocated to implementation of the programme of the Decade for Action to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination, especially given the recommendation of the Commission on Human Rights concerning the organization of a world conference on that subject in 2001 at the latest.

22. Her delegation agreed with the observations in paragraph 230 of the CPC report to the effect that the Secretariat should indicate what criteria it used in allocating resources to policy-making organs, substantive activities and support services, as well as between and within subprogrammes.

23. Another subject of grave concern for her delegation was that of the increase in staff at the New York Liaison Office and the resulting effects on the Centre's activities in Geneva. More information was needed on the new posts and the functions of the new appointees.

24. She also wished to receive more information on the end use of the $52,300 allocated in paragraph 22.33 of the proposed programme budget for news agency wire services. She also wished to know why there had been a change in the way general operating costs were presented, as noted in paragraph 22.34. Concerning paragraph 22.38, she requested the Secretariat to explain how coordination would be ensured amongst the competent departments in respect of activities related to the right to development. Finally, she would like to know the reasons for the changes in posts indicated under that section of the budget.

25. With regard to planned activities, her delegation wished to know the nature of and justification for the participation of the Office of the High Commissioner in activities having to do with good governance, which seemed quite outside its mandate.

26. In connection with section 23, her delegation took note of the observations of the Advisory Committee in paragraph VI.16 of its report, especially the fact that the regular budget of the United Nations contributed only 2 per cent of the budget of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. She was concerned by the low level of resources allocated to that programme and feared that problems would arise during implementation. Under section 24, she unconditionally supported the programme of activities for the Palestine refugees but pointed out that the resources

allocated for the 1998-1999 biennium had dropped appreciably. She observed in particular that 8 budgetary and 19 extrabudgetary posts were to be eliminated and took note of the comments of the Advisory Committee in paragraph VI.20 of its report, according to which it had not received sufficient information to justify those reductions. Her delegation would refrain from commenting on section 25 until a later date.

27. **Mr. Hanson** (Canada), speaking also on behalf of Australia and New Zealand, said that he shared the concern expressed by the representative of Belgium on behalf of the European Union and the associated countries about the reduction in resources allocated to the human rights programme and the resulting elimination of posts. While recognizing that it was necessary to reduce spending in the current budgetary context, he stressed that that cut was contrary to the consensus achieved in Vienna in 1993 during the World Conference on Human Rights to the effect that the international community must allocate more resources to human rights activities. He unconditionally supported the merger of the Centre for Human Rights and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights since he was convinced that the consolidation would result in increased efficiency. It was unacceptable to try to encroach on the prerogatives conferred on the Secretary-General under the Charter. There was no question that the decision to merge those two bodies fell within the scope of those prerogatives and was in keeping with the mandate given to the High Commissioner by the General Assembly in resolution 48/141. Given the coordinating role conferred on the High Commissioner by the terms of that resolution and many subsequent resolutions, the New York Liaison Office needed to be strengthened, and must have staff with the desired qualifications. In addition, the method of financing operations outside headquarters must be more predictable.

28. **Mr. Kabir** (Bangladesh) said he was pleased that the resources to be allocated to subprogramme 1 of section 22 had been increased slightly. However, considering the importance of that subprogramme and the fact that it had been relatively neglected in the past, it should be given more resources. Since the right to development had come to be recognized as a fundamental human right, it should be dissociated from research and analysis to become the subject of a separate subprogramme. His delegation supported the proposal concerning the redeployment of posts to subprogramme 1 and the conversion of four temporary posts to established posts (para. 22.41), as well as the proposal to maintain the current level of resources for the activities of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories.

29. With respect to section 24 on Palestine refugees, his delegation fully supported the activities carried out by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) to provide Palestine refugees with essential services (such as education, health care and social services). It welcomed the cooperation among UNRWA, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Health Organization (WHO), and hoped that other United Nations agencies would develop similar cooperation with UNRWA. The latter should strengthen its activities in certain areas in response to the unforeseen impact on the Palestinians' living conditions of the unilateral and arbitrary measures taken recently by the Israeli Government. He was particularly concerned about the proposal to abolish 8 regular budget posts and 19 extrabudgetary posts. The current level of resources, in terms of staff and programme support, should be maintained for as long as the peace process failed to make tangible progress, *inter alia,* with respect to the resettlement of the refugees. If those post reductions were maintained, the Secretariat should justify them. In that connection, he endorsed the comments contained in paragraph VI.20 of the Advisory Committee's report.

30. **Mr. Zhang Wanhai** (China) said he regretted that the Committee for Programme and Coordination had been unable to reach a consensus on section 22 of the proposed programme budget. With respect to subprogramme 1, his delegation shared the view of the Advisory Committee that the Secretary-General should explain how the provisions of General Assembly resolution 50/214 would be implemented, and agreed with the representative of Bangladesh that the resources allocated to that subprogramme were insufficient. He endorsed the Advisory Committee's comments on the need to review the size of the New York Liaison Office of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

31. His delegation noted that 1,488 meetings of intergovernmental organs would be held in the 1998-1999 biennium. It hoped that the Secretariat would provide additional information in that regard, and shared the Advisory Committee's view that a more pragmatic meeting programme should be devised for the various subcommissions, committees and other groups, and that some meetings should be held every other year. It was his delegation's understanding that the Centre for Human Rights and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights had merged and that the entity resulting from the merger had moved out of the Palais des Nations. He

asked why the merger had taken place and whether it had entailed an increase or a decrease in posts, and requested more details on the reasons for the change of premises and on the latter's financial implications.

32. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation attached the highest importance to the activities of UNRWA. It noted, from table 24.2 of the proposed programme budget, that the activities of UNRWA, whether they concerned emergency assistance or social initiatives, were financed in large part by voluntary contributions. He recalled that the General Assembly had decided, by its resolution 3331 (XXIX) of 17 December 1974, that the expenses for salaries of UNRWA staff should be financed by the regular budget for the duration of the Agency's mandate; the current mandate would end in 1999. According to paragraph 22.8 of the medium-term plan, some of the Agency's staff were paid from voluntary contributions. His delegation felt that adequate resources financed from the Organization's regular budget should be allocated to UNRWA to enable it to carry out its mandate. He noted the proposal to abolish seven Professional posts and one General Service post, and joined the Advisory Committee in regretting that the reduction had not been explained. Refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic, Lebanon and Jordan urgently needed the humanitarian assistance provided by UNRWA; the international community should therefore increase the latter's resources instead of reducing them. Increased resources should also be made available to the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories. Both bodies should pursue their activities for as long as the Israeli occupation continued and the rightful owners of the land – the Palestine refugees – had not returned to their homes.

33. **Mr. Atiyanto** (Indonesia) said that his delegation attached great importance to the work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and that the relevant programme narrative should be consistent with the medium-term plan, particularly with respect to activities relating to the right to development. Since discussions on human rights were complex and delicate, and the Committee for Programme and Coordination had been unable to formulate a recommendation to the General Assembly on section 22, his delegation would make no further comments at the current stage, but reserved the right to do so in informal consultations. It strongly supported the United Nations programme to assist Palestine refugees (section 24). Since the activities of UNRWA were an essential element of stability in the region, it was paradoxical that the Agency faced budgetary difficulties and that eight established posts financed from the regular budget were to be abolished. As the Palestinian people embarked on the task of building their nation, the international community, for its part, must allocate to UNRWA the resources it needed to fulfil its mandate.

34. **Mr. Repasch** (United States of America) said that his delegation would make detailed comments at a later stage, but that it wished to stress that it shared the views expressed by the representative of Belgium on behalf of the European Union with respect to the programme on human rights. He recalled that the United States had asked the Advisory Committee to submit, before the beginning of informal consultations on the budget, a summary of its proposals indicating the financial implications of each of its recommendations. His delegation, which continued to support UNRWA, felt that section 24 gave an accurate picture of the Agency's activities in various spheres, but did not mention the efforts it made to streamline its activities or the considerable difficulties it encountered in mobilizing voluntary contributions. Donors, host Governments and the Agency were currently assessing the situation with a view to ensuring the financial viability of UNRWA. It was essential that the budget estimates for operating expenses should be consistent with the resources available. Budget appropriations represented only a small part of the Agency's total financing, over 90 per cent of which came from voluntary contributions.

35. **Mr. Darwish** (Egypt) said that he fully supported section 24 on Palestine refugees. UNRWA must be provided with adequate resources, either from the regular budget or from extrabudgetary funds. His delegation had noted the proposal to abolish eight regular budget posts; it hoped that that reduction would not affect the Agency's activities and that the Secretariat would give assurances to that effect. For as long as the problem of Palestine refugees, and the question of Palestine in general, had not been settled in all their aspects, the Agency's activities should continue at the same level. Since the reform proposals submitted by the Secretary-General had implications for the budget sections under consideration, his delegation reserved the right to return to those sections at a later stage.

36. **Mr. Mirmohammad** (Islamic Republic of Iran) recalled that paragraph 236 of the CPC report contained proposals intended to bring the human rights programme narrative into line with the medium-term plan and the guidelines of the policy-making organs. His delegation was one of those disturbed by the low level of resources proposed for subprogramme 1, for it considered that the subprogramme should have received more funds, especially in connection with the right to development, which had

always been neglected. On the other hand, it endorsed paragraph VI.2 of the ACABQ report (A/52/7 (chap. II, Part VI)), where it was noted that the General Assembly had adopted programme 19, Human rights, without prejudice to its consideration of the process of restructuring the Centre for Human Rights – on the outcome of which no information whatsoever was available.

37. His delegation also supported the Advisory Committee's comments concerning the auditing of trust funds (para. VI.5), the right to development (para. VI.8), the New York Liaison Office (para. VI.10), the meeting programme for organs of the Commission on Human Rights (para. VI.11), the guidelines relating to human rights reports (para. VI.12) and the publication programme of the Centre for Human Rights (para. VI.13).

38. His delegation would like clarification on the conversion of temporary posts to permanent posts proposed in section 22. With reference to the comments concerning a possible weakening of the prerogatives of the Secretary-General, attention was drawn to the process initiated in other bodies and to General Assembly resolution 51/219. Concerning section 23, his delegation strongly supported the relevant CPC recommendations and the ACABQ comments in paragraph VI.17 regarding the funding of regular budget posts from extrabudgetary funds. It further supported the comments of the representative of the Syrian Arab Republic on section 24. It reserved the right to make further comments on the sections under consideration when document A/52/303 was submitted to the Fifth Committee.

39. **Mr. Yamagiwa** (Japan), referring to section 22 of the proposed programme budget, reiterated his delegation's concern about the way in which the Commission on Human Rights established its meeting programme. His delegation understood the priority given to programme 19, Human rights, but felt that better use should be made of funds by rationalizing the meeting programme, as recommended by ACABQ in paragraph VI.11 of its report. Concerning section 23, his delegation noted that 24 General Service posts were to be abolished and hoped that the Secretariat would confirm that abolishing them would not compromise the implementation of mandated activities. Regarding section 25, his delegation was disturbed by the fact that more than 90 per cent of the activities approved in the area of humanitarian assistance would be financed from extra budgetary funds. It believed that the humanitarian assistance programme, which was one of the Organization's priority activities, should be funded largely by budgetary appropriations.

40. **Mr. Halbwachs** (Controller), replying to questions from delegations, said, with regard to human rights, that the restructuring of the Centre for Human Rights had been carried out in accordance with the guidelines set out in the report of the Secretary-General on the matter (A/C.5/50/71). At the end of section 22 of the proposed programme budget, there was an organizational chart of the new structure, comprising three units corresponding to the three subprogrammes of the medium-term plan. With regard to the right to development, the allocated funds represented 24.9 per cent of the total programme appropriations (table 22.8). The subprogramme had been strengthened by transferring a number of posts assigned to other subprogrammes. Some delegations had asked for a detailed breakdown of the costs within the subprogramme; but since the Secretariat did not calculate the cost of the activities individually, it was impossible to provide that information. The following criteria had been used in distributing funds among the policy-making organs, executive direction and management, the programme of work and programme support: the funds allocated to the policy-making human rights organs (table 22.4) must be sufficient to enable all nine of them to hold their sessions; the funds allocated to executive direction and management covered the operating expenditures of the Office of the High Commissioner and its staff; the funds allocated to the programme of work supported substantive activities and the implementation of the three subprogrammes; and the funds allocated to programme support covered expenditures in connection with the administrative support provided for the Centre for Human Rights.

41. Concerning the appropriation of funds for unapproved activities, the Secretariat made provision each year in the proposed programme budget for funds needed to finance the work of the special rapporteurs that would be appointed and the working groups that would be set up, without, however, knowing the exact list because that would be determined later by the Commission on Human Rights. That way of proceeding had been approved by the General Assembly. Nevertheless, in that instance the Secretariat had no doubt been unduly specific in the programme narrative. As regarded the news agency wire services (para. 22.33), the Centre for Human Rights needed, in order to follow the changing situation in the countries where it conducted activities in the field, to have access to press communiqués as soon as they arrived. It shared the cost of subscriptions with the information services of the United Nations Office at Geneva. As for general operating costs, they had been presented in a way that consolidated the expenditures coherently. Some delegations were of the opinion that there

were too many meetings. In his report on the reform, the Secretary-General had also emphasized that the schedule of meetings of the human rights bodies must be rationalized and had asked the High Commissioner to review the question. That task, however, could not be done except in consultation with all the bodies concerned. As for moving the offices of the Centre for Human Rights and the Office of the High Commissioner, both were still at the Palais des Nations but there was indeed a proposal to move them to the Palais Wilson, and the Secretariat would soon be submitting a note on the matter to the Commission.

42. The abolition of posts at the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) was a consequence of the overall reduction of the United Nations budget, which had to cover all the sections. In the case of UNRWA, where the Organization funded only posts, the reduction could not be made in any way other than by abolishing posts. The situation of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees was similar. In both cases, the percentage of regular budget resources in the overall budget of those agencies was very low – on the order of 1 to 2 per cent – and should not have a great impact on their activities, which were financed essentially from extrabudgetary funds.

43. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that he was disappointed by the explanations given by the Controller, who had not justified the large budget reductions proposed for UNRWA. He would like a proper explanation to be given in writing and was surprised that the Controller had referred to a document that was not under consideration.

44. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) said that she, too, thought the explanation should be made in writing. She believed that any reference to a specific country or theme should be deleted from the part of section 22 dealing with the activities of special rapporteurs, because at that stage nothing had been decided on that score. She reiterated her questions regarding sections 22.38 and 22.40 (c) (i), and asked for answers from the Secretariat.

45. **Mr. Mirmohammad** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that the Controller had not responded clearly to the question concerning the conversion of temporary posts to established posts. With regard to paragraph VI.8 of the report of the Advisory Committee, which dealt with the right to development, he said that the addendum that was supposed to be issued had not been compiled.

46. **Mr. Halbwachs** (Controller) told the representative of Iran that there was no longer any reason for an addendum on resources distribution, since the information in question was now contained in the proposed programme budget. Regarding the conversion of temporary posts created when the post of High Commissioner for Human Rights had been established, he said that the functions attributed to those posts were permanent in nature.

47. He had taken note of the other questions posed by the representative of Cuba and would reply at a later date.

48. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba,) supported by **Mr. Moktefi** (Algeria), insisted that the Secretariat should communicate to the Committee the distribution of resources among the various components of subprogramme 1: the right to development, on the one hand, and research and analysis, on the other. She also enquired whether detailed information had been submitted on the restructuring of the Centre for Human Rights.

49. **The Chairman** said that, if she heard no objection, she would take it that the Committee had concluded the general debate on sections 22 to 25 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999.

50. *It was so decided.*

*Section 26. Public information*

51. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that section 26 of the proposed programme budget (Public information) would inevitably be affected by the Secretary-General's reform proposals (A/51/950), as well as by the recommendations of the Task Force on the Reorientation of United Nations Public Information Activities. He drew the attention of the members of the Fifth Committee to the relevant report of the Advisory Committee (A/52/7 (Chap. II, Part VII)), in particular paragraph 5.

52. ***Ms. Incera*** *(Costa Rica), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

53. **Mr. Chinvanno** (Vice-Chairman of the Committee for Programme and Coordination) said that CPC had studied the programme narrative of section 26 at length. In paragraph 267 of its report, it had taken note of the narrative, subject to further consideration, and taking into account the modification it referred to in that paragraph. It had taken up the question again at its resumed session, but had not formulated a recommendation.

54. **Mr. Marcondes de Carvalho** (Brazil) stressed the importance of the Department of Public Information, whose activities were essential in order for the United Nations to win universal support; the Department had yet to extend its activities to all the countries of the world. In that connection, the decrease of nearly 2 per cent in the estimated budget for public information was disturbing and would involve, in

particular, the abolition of 28 Professional posts, 24 General Service posts and 29 posts in other categories. His delegation was particularly concerned at the trend in the budget of the Media Division. State-of-the-art technology should not be introduced at the expense of more traditional technologies, particularly radio broadcasting. His delegation wondered if there was any correlation between the increase in the provision requested for contractual services and the decrease in the number of posts. It also wished to know how many posts in the Department of Public Information were vacant. Once again, it stressed the need for the Secretariat to provide specific information on the amount of the appropriations for the production and broadcasting of radio programmes and the publication of magazines in the Portuguese language.

55. **Ms. Emerson** (Portugal) said that she supported the comments made by the representative of Brazil. Already in 1989, abolition of the post corresponding to Portuguese broadcasts from the Media Division had been contemplated; her delegation had expressed its concern at the time and received assurances in that regard. She wished to know whether the post was among those whose abolition was contemplated; radio broadcasts were one of the most economical means of reaching a very large number of people anywhere in the world. She pointed out that Portuguese was spoken by more than 200 million people.

56. **Mr. Mirmohammad** (Islamic Republic of Iran) expressed the hope that the planned reductions would not affect the quality of the services provided by the Department of Public Information. His delegation also attached great importance to the activities of the United Nations information centres. Like other delegations, it was concerned by a certain imbalance in the dissemination of information in the world and hoped that development efforts would be more widely publicized. It requested that the information centres should not be integrated in other United Nations offices without the Governments concerned being consulted.

57. **Ms. Peña** (Mexico) said that all languages were not treated equally by the Department of Public Information. Unfortunately, CPC had made no recommendation in that regard, and some publications did not appear in all the official languages of the Organization. Compromising the principle of multilingualism solely for budgetary reasons was unacceptable; her delegation requested that paragraph 26.39 of the proposed programme budget should be amended so as to ensure respect for that principle and reserved the right to speak again on that question.

58. **Mr. Darwish** (Egypt) expressed the fear that any reduction in the budget of the Department of Public Information would affect the quality of the services provided. Since public information was one of the major activities of the United Nations, his delegation noted with satisfaction that, in paragraph VII.5 of its report, the Advisory Committee advocated expanding the Department's coordinating role and redeploying to it resources related to public information activities that were currently budgeted under other budget sections. The operation of modern technologies must not overshadow the continuing importance of the traditional media, particularly in the developing countries. Lastly, the six official languages must be treated equally; regrettably, that was not the case.

59. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba), referring to the comments made during the CPC session concerning the translation of publications into the six official languages, said that she reserved the right to speak on that question at a later date.

60. **Mr. Sach** (Director, Programme Planning and Budget Division), replying to the representative of Brazil, explained that the increase in the provision for contractual services (para. 26.58) took effective expenditure into account. It had been noted that there had been a tendency to underestimate the technical services necessary for the production and distribution of radio and visual programmes. A decrease in resources under that budget item would inevitably curtail activities.

61. With regard to multilingualism, he said that the Department of Public Information would continue to produce programmes in a great many languages, as reflected in paragraph 26.24 of the proposed programme budget. In that connection, he stressed that the provision for the Department would decrease by only 1.8 per cent, whereas the decrease in the overall budget was 4.7 per cent. Depending on the volume of work, the Department used contractual personnel for languages other than the six official languages.

62. **Ms. Emerson** (Portugal) said that Portuguese language programmes had existed for a number of decades; she did not understand why full-time duties which had been discharged for years were not entrusted to permanent staff.

63. **Mr. Sach** (Director, Programme Planning and Budget Division) said that the hiring of staff under special service agreements was more cost-effective than the use of permanent staff.

64. **Mr. Marcondes de Carvalho** (Brazil) endorsed the statement made by the representative of Portugal and, referring to the justification on the ground of cost for the preference for the use of special service agreements, wondered whether the Secretariat intended to submit a proposal aimed at extending the practice.

65. **Mr. Halbwachs** (Controller) said that the Secretariat had no such intention.

66. **The Chairman** said that, if she heard no objection, she would take it that the Committee had concluded its general discussion on section 26 of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999.

67. *It was so decided.*

*Section 27. Administrative services*

*Section 27A. Office of the Under-Secretary-General for Administration and Management*

*Section 27B. Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts*

*Section 27C. Office of Human Resources Management*

*Section 27D. Support services*

*Section 27E. Conference services*

*Section 27F. Administration, Geneva*

*Section 27G. Administration, Vienna*

*Section 27H. Administration, Nairobi*

68. **Mr. Mselle** (Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions) said that part VIII was the largest part of the programme budget in terms of the human and financial resources it included. For the biennium 1998-1999, estimated expenditure after recosting amounted to $904.2 million. The proposed staffing table consisted of 3,347 posts funded under the regular budget, which represented a reduction of 578 posts (131 in the Professional category and above, 402 in the General Service category and 45 in other categories). In paragraphs VIII.3 to VIII.17 of its report, the Advisory Committee made general comments on section 27 as a whole, including the proposal to reduce administrative costs from 38 to 25 per cent, the three pilot projects being initiated in New York, Vienna and Santiago, the concept of "charge back" and the concept of "output" (results-based) budgeting. In chapter I of its report, the Advisory Committee had made detailed comments and recommendations on those issues in the context of the Secretary-General's reform proposals. Since close cooperation between the Secretariat and Member States was essential to the success of the reforms, the Advisory Committee had requested that a number of reports should be submitted to the relevant intergovernmental bodies before the proposals were implemented.

69. With respect to the Office of Programme Planning, Budget and Accounts, the Advisory Committee recommended, in chapter II of its report, that the Under-Secretary-General and the Controller should review the proposals relating to the staffing of the Office, which had experienced difficulties in meeting the deadlines for the submission of the many reports requested by the Fifth Committee and the Advisory Committee. In paragraph VIII.30, the Advisory Committee recommended that a review should be made of the structure and timing of the financial statements and schedules to be submitted to the General Assembly.

70. In paragraph VIII.34, the Advisory Committee questioned the wisdom of the proposed post reductions in the Office of Human Resources Management. It felt that the narrative portions of section 27C should be more focused in future budget submissions. In paragraph VIII.42, it emphasized that the delegation of authority should be clearly spelled out in writing so that managers would understand exactly what responsibilities had been delegated to them and what they were accountable for. In paragraph VIII.47, the Advisory Committee commented on the lack of uniformity in the presentation of the estimates for medical services in all sections of the proposed programme budget and requested that the problem should be reviewed. Paragraphs VIII.49 to VIII.59 focused on training. In view of the importance of that issue, the Advisory Committee provided some statistical information in paragraph VIII.54 and recommended, in paragraph VIII.59, that the programme should be evaluated.

71. In paragraphs VIII.60 to VIII.129, which concerned support services, the Advisory Committee pointed out that the use of gratis personnel presented a potential conflict of interest (para. VIII.65). Paragraph VIII.67, which dealt with information technology services and the Integrated Management Information System (IMIS), should be read in conjunction with paragraphs VIII.78 and VIII.96. The Advisory Committee recommended the postponement of the proposed reclassification of a D-1 post to the D-2 level and of the proposed conversion of 29 general temporary assistance posts to established posts. In paragraph VIII.78, the Advisory Committee recommended that IMIS and information technology services should be merged. In paragraph VIII.96, it emphasized the advantage of new technologies for an organization with shrinking budgetary resources and recommended that the Secretary-General should appoint an information technology task force. The Advisory Committee had paid particular attention to user support services and had made detailed recommendations, in paragraph VIII.98, on the use of contract staff to provide such services. Lastly, in paragraph VIII.103, it recommended that the savings achieved should be ploughed back into new technologies.

72. Paragraphs VIII.130 to VIII.158 dealt with conference services. With respect to the number of meetings for which services had been requested but could not be provided, he referred to paragraph VIII.145 of the Advisory Committee's report and to the information he had given in reply to a question from the representative of the United States of America. With respect to the use of temporary assistance to reduce costs, it was important to ensure that such measures did not affect the quality of the services provided. There was a need to harmonize the use of new technologies in New York, Vienna and Geneva and to ensure connectivity among those systems (para. VIII.149). In paragraph VIII.151, the Advisory Committee requested that the possibility of providing it with video-conferencing facilities should be explored, since that would enable it to involve programme managers from duty stations away from Headquarters in its discussions on issues which concerned them. In the long term, that solution would be much more economical than the current arrangement.

73. **Mr. Chinvanno** (Vice-Chairman of the Committee for Programme and Coordination) said that in paragraphs 275 and 276 of its report on the first part of its regular session, the Committee for Programme and Coordination (CPC) had formulated conclusions and recommendations concerning subsections 27A, 27B, 27D, 27F, 27G and 27H, subject to further consideration. Proposals under subsections 27C and 27E had been submitted later. CPC had considered them at its resumed session and its conclusions and recommendations were contained respectively in paragraphs 16 to 18 and paragraph 23 of the addendum to its report, in which it recommended to the General Assembly that it should approve the narratives contained in those subsections.

**Organization of work**

74. **Ms. Buergo Rodriguez** (Cuba), referring to the programme of work proposed for the week of 10 to 14 November, said that the consultations on agenda item 114 were unlikely to succeed. It would therefore be better for the Committee to focus on the consideration of priority items.

75. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Syrian Arab Republic) endorsed the statement of the Cuban delegation. Furthermore, the Secretariat should reply in writing to the questions that his delegation had asked with respect to Conference Services.

76. **Mr. Maddens** (Belgium) said that the draft resolution on agenda item 114 should be considered even if it had not been finalized. However, it was for the Bureau to make a decision thereon.

77. **Mr. Zhang Wanhai** (China) said that the informal consultations scheduled to be held on agenda item 119 on Tuesday, 11 November would take place at the same time as the consultations on reform scheduled in plenary meeting, which might pose some problems for delegations.

78. **Mr. Menkveld** (Netherlands) wondered why items 143 and 114 should be considered separately in the informal consultations as they had been considered together when the relevant reports had been introduced.

79. **Ms. Peña** (Mexico) endorsed the remarks of the representatives of China and the Netherlands and, recalling that a special session of the General Assembly was scheduled to be held soon, noted that, in such a case, the General Assembly should follow the normal practice whereby the Main Committees did not meet.

80. **The Chairman** said that the Bureau had taken note of the concerns of delegations and that, if consultations on reform were held in plenary meeting, the Fifth Committee's informal consultations would be deferred to 6 p.m.

81. **Mr. Sial** (Pakistan), coordinator for the consultations on item 114, said that no consensus had been reached on the proposed draft resolution, although the issue had been under discussion for a long time. However, it would be for the Bureau to decide how to proceed.

82. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Syrian Arab Republic), supported by **Mr. Darwish** (Egypt), said that the Secretariat should take into account the special session of the General Assembly.

83. **Ms. Buergo Rodríguez** (Cuba) proposed that the informal consultations scheduled for 12 November on item 114 should be replaced by consultations on the pattern of conferences, if consultations on reform were actually held on 11 November.

84. **Mr. Thorne** (United Kingdom) supported the coordinator on the draft resolution on item 114, and said that he, too, would leave the matter to the Bureau.

85. **Mr. Acapko-Satchivi** (Secretary of the Committee) said that it was preferable to maintain the consultations scheduled for Wednesday, 12 November on item 114. The question had been under consideration since the forty-seventh session. Item 143 concerned only the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the Office of Internal Oversight Services. Moreover, the issues which would be considered at the special session of the General Assembly had nothing at all in common with the items on the Fifth Committee's agenda. If the consultations initially scheduled to be held on the items on the Committee's agenda were cancelled, it would be necessary to reschedule them for evening meetings. Referring to the Cuban representative's

proposal, he said that the Committee would not have enough time after its formal meeting on 12 November to deal with an item as important as the pattern of conferences.

86. **Mr. Smith** (Ireland), referring to the proposal to hold night meetings should the proposed programme be amended, noted that such an arrangement would be costlier.

*The meeting rose at 1.20 p.m.*